

Lightning Safety Tips for Alaskans



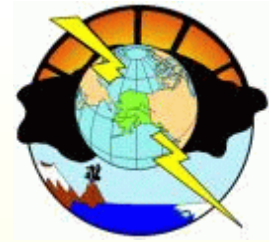
The National Weather Service, Alaska Region, would like to take this opportunity to provide our coastal and interior communities with some important lightning safety information.

For Those That Live or Work on the Water....

Thunderstorms along Alaska's southern coasts are infrequent and sometimes unpredictable. Even with the best weather reports, boaters can still be caught in open waters during a thunderstorm. Then, with or without a lightning protection system, it is critical to take additional safety precautions to protect the boat's occupants.

The most obvious, and hopefully instinctive, response is to seek safe harbor when weather conditions are threatening, and stay off the water until the weather improves. But if you find yourself caught in a storm while out on the water, you should take the following precautions:

- Stay in the center of the cabin if the boat is so designed. If no enclosure is available, stay low in the boat. Don't be a human lightning mast!
- Keep arms and legs in the boat. Do not dangle them in the water.
- Discontinue fishing, scuba diving, or other water activities when there is lightning or even when sky conditions look threatening. The first lightning strike can be a mile or more in front of an approaching thunderstorm cloud.
- Disconnect and do not use or touch the major electronic equipment, including the radio, throughout the duration of the storm.
- Lower, remove, or tie down the radio antenna and other protruding devices if they are not part of a lightning protection system.
- To the degree possible, avoid making contact with any portion of the boat connected to the lightning protection system (if present).
- Keep in mind it is always a good idea to have individuals aboard who are competent in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid. Many individuals struck by lightning or exposed to excessive electrical current can be saved with prompt and proper care. There is no danger in touching persons after they have been struck by lightning.
- If a boat has been, or is suspected of having been, struck by lightning, check out the electrical system and compasses before setting out again to ensure that no damage has occurred.



For Those That Live in the Interior...

During the summer months, particularly from late June to early July, active thunderstorm days can result in 2,000 – 5,000 cloud-to-ground strikes in a single day. Although it is fairly rare, people have been struck by lightning in Alaska, so it is important to keep these safety tips in mind as we approach the summer season:

- All thunderstorms produce lightning and are dangerous. If you can hear thunder, go to a safe shelter immediately.
- Don't wait for rain to postpone outdoor activities. Most people struck by lightning are not in the rain!
- Don't be the tallest object around. In the mountains if you are above treeline, you ARE the highest object around. Quickly get below treeline and get into a grove of small trees. Avoid tall trees or you will be the second tallest object around!
- Sturdy buildings are the safest place to be. If no sturdy building is nearby, a hard-top vehicle with windows closed will offer some protection. The steel frame of the vehicle provides some protection if you are not touching metal.
- Do NOT take shelter under a tree. If there is no shelter, crouch in the open, keeping twice as far away from a tree as it is tall.
- Avoid leaning against vehicles. Get off bicycles and motorcycles.
- Stay off the beach and out of small boats or canoes. If caught in a boat, crouch down in the center of the boat away from metal hardware. Swimming, wading, snorkeling and scuba diving are NOT safe. Lightning can strike the water and travel some distance beneath and away from its point of contact. Don't stand in puddles of water, even if wearing rubber boots.
- Avoid metal! Drop metal backpacks, stay away from clothes lines, fences, exposed sheds and electrically conductive elevated objects. Don't hold on to metal items such as golf clubs, fishing rods, tennis rackets or tools.
- Do NOT stay in a group. Stay several yards away from other people. Don't share a bleacher bench or huddle in a group.
- If someone is struck by lightning, call 9-1-1. Get medical attention as soon as possible. Give first aid and don't worry about touching the victim. People struck by lightning carry no electrical charge that can shock other people.